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### Attitudes that Annoy us at Work. An Approach to Impoliteness Strategies and Cultural Differences

Rosa María Pacheco Baldó<sup>1</sup> ·



<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2740-9693>

Universidad de Alicante

Facultad de Filosofía y Letras I (Filología Inglesa) P1, Alicante, Spain



#### ABSTRACT

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This paper, which forms part of the research carried out for my doctoral dissertation, presents a new taxonomy of what I called social characteristics of individuals. This is a new approach that reorganises the traditional concepts of face and social rights. I named these social characteristics as follows: public image of singularity, public right of equality, public right of affiliation and public right of independence. These social characteristics are understood and emphasised differently by every culture. In other words, the characteristics will be dealt with by every cultural group in their own way, depending on and according to the cultural values of the group. Furthermore, these four social characteristics of individuals can be attacked or threatened with a series of impoliteness strategies. As an example, this article will analyse two of the most studied cultural dimensions: power and identity. To illustrate these ideas, I will present the data obtained from some questionnaires done by two groups of respondents, a Spanish one and an American one. The different values that these two cultures have will reflect on their answers.

#### RESUMEN

Este artículo, que forma parte de la investigación realizada para mi tesis doctoral, presenta una nueva taxonomía de lo que he denominado características sociales del individuo, con un nuevo enfoque que reorganiza los conceptos tradicionales de imagen pública y derechos públicos. He nombrado estas características sociales: imagen pública de singularidad, derecho público de igualdad, derecho público de afiliación y derecho público de independencia. Estas características sociales son entendidas y gestionadas de forma diferente por cada grupo cultural, dependiendo de los valores de ese grupo. Además, las características sociales podrán ser atacadas o amenazadas con una serie de estrategias de descortesía. A modo de ejemplo, se analizan en este artículo dos de las dimensiones culturales más estudiadas, la de

<sup>1</sup> Corresponding author · Email: [rosa.pacheco@ua.es](mailto:rosa.pacheco@ua.es)



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poder y la de identidad. Para ilustrar estas ideas, se muestran aquí los datos obtenidos de unos cuestionarios hechos a dos grupos de informantes, un grupo de españoles y otro de estadounidenses. Los diferentes valores culturales que los hablantes de estos dos grupos tienen se verán reflejados en sus respuestas.

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## 1. Introduction

There is a great deal of research that establishes the pragmalinguistic differences among various languages. However, there is less research that relates those differences to different cultural values. Furthermore, despite the efforts made by some authors such as Cashman (2006), Guerra Bernal (2008), Stenström and Jorgensen (2008), Kaul de Marlangeon (2008), Kaul de Marlangeon and Alba Juez (2012) or the international congresses of the EDICE Programme from the University of Stockholm, the truth is that, as Placencia (2010) points out, there is a lack of research to be done in Spanish compared with other languages. In addition, Cashman (2006) states that compared to the production of research papers on politeness in Spanish and other languages, the production of research on impoliteness in Spanish is rather minor.

On the one hand, this study proposes a definition of the cultural dimensions of power and identity, based mainly in Hofstede's (1980, 1991) works, although it also includes other authors' contributions such as Leaptrott's (1996) and Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars' (1993, 1998, 2000, 2001 y 2004). On the other hand, this paper offers a new conception of the traditional concepts of face and social rights, presenting an original taxonomy based on Bravo's (1999, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2008, 2010) and Spencer-Oatey's (2000, 2003) works and contributions.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Hofstede's view of cultural dimensions: Power and identity

According to Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961) cultural dimensions are "a limited number of common human problems for which all peoples must at all times find some solution." (1961: 10). In other words, cultural dimensions are the problems or basic issues every single person must deal with when interacting with other people and with their environment. The different tools these cultural groups or peoples use as guidelines to understand and manage these issues will vary from one group to another.

Thus, given the importance of cultural differences, nowadays there are a number of scholars and researchers who devote their work to helping companies and people who must carry out economic and labour exchanges with other companies or with people based in countries with different cultures and values. Some of these authors are Hofstede (1980, 1991), Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars (1993, 1998, 2000, 2001, 2004), Schwartz (1992, 1994, 1999, 2006), Leaptrott (1996), etc. In particular, I would like to highlight Hofstede, who carried out an exhaustive study throughout more than seventy countries, gathering thousands of data from

questionnaires to workers of the multinational company IBM all over the world. In *Culture's Consequences* (2001 [1980]) and *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind* (2004 [1991]), Hofstede showed that there are cultural dimensions underneath the visible face of every culture. These cultural dimensions are the following ones:

- Power Distance Index: a dimension related to power.
- Individualism Index: a dimension related to identity.
- Masculinity Index: a dimension related to gender.
- Uncertainty Avoidance Index: a dimension related to the search of certainty.
- Long-Term Orientation: a dimension related to the concept of virtue.

In the last edition of *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind* (Hofstede et al, 2010), Hofstede revises the data from his previous work and he includes new one such as Spain's Long-Term Orientation Index that used to be absent. In this last edition, he also adds a sixth dimension, based on Michael Minkov's analysis of the World Values Survey data for 93 countries. This new dimension is called Indulgence versus Restraint Index.

From my point of view, Hofstede's strengths are the clear and straightforward explanations he offers, the applicability of the model, especially in working environments, and the accessibility of the model and methods of analysis, which can be freely downloaded from the internet. Furthermore, as we can see, Hofstede is continuously recycling and updating the data from his research and that is another reason why I consider him to be one of the most important contributors to the study of cultural dimensions. It must be taken into account that Hofstede's and the aforementioned authors' analysis must be taken as a tool to analyse differences at a national and anthropological level, not at a personal or psychological one, as Bennett (2004) points out. Kecskes (2010) also adds that the cultural models people belong to, apart from the particular context they are in and the personal characteristics they possess will condition the relationship that individuals establish.

Having said that, and according to Hofstede's measurements and results (Hofstede, 1980, 1991; Hofstede et al, 2010), the United States would be an individualist country, with an index of 91 points out of 100, whereas Spain would be halfway between individualism and collectivism with an index of 51 points. Regarding the cultural dimension of power, the United States has a medium-low index of 40 points, unlike Spain, which has a medium-high index of 57 points.

Table 1 shows the differences found by Hofstede (1980, 1991) between Spain and the United States regarding the two cultural dimensions targeted in this analysis.

	Power Distance Index	Individualism Index
Spain	57	51
United States	40	91

Table 1. Differences between Spain and the United States according to Hofstede's model

Special consideration must be taken into Leaptrott (1996), who introduced the concept of tribal societies. These cultural groups would be halfway between individualism and collectivism, being Spain an example of such tribal cultural groups.

## 2.2. Brown and Levinson, Bravo and Spencer-Oatey's politeness models

Research about impoliteness started using the assumptions and premises used for describing politeness. However, many voices raised against considering impoliteness as just the opposite of politeness. That said, I would like to briefly mention just a few of the conceptual basis of politeness postulates, as they would later be used for the development of the study of impoliteness, and because they guided the model presented here.

One of the most influential contributions is Brown and Levinson's (1987) Model Person theory, which is based on the idea of face, taken in turn from Goffman (1967). This theory considers that all individuals struggle to maintain their public image in front of the rest of the world. The face, or public image, has two sides: a negative one that relates to everyone's desire not to be invaded or interfered and, at the same time, the desire to protect one's own territory and rights; and a positive side that is related to everybody's desire to be loved and appreciated by their peers. According to the authors, sometimes there are acts that can threaten people's face—or as they call them, face threatening acts (FTA)—and that can be softened or minimised using the politeness strategies shown below. These five strategies are then unfolded and developed into several strategies.

- On record, without redress
- On record, with redress, with positive politeness
- On record, with redress, with negative politeness
- Off record
- Avoid the FTA

Despite being a complete and exhaustive model, it was fiercely criticised because of its alleged universality and because of its negativity, as the model sees almost every act as a face threatening act—including the action of thanking somebody.

In the context of this paper, I would also like to highlight the importance of Bravo (1999, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2008, 2010), who is one of the authors that inspired me for the model herein presented. According to Bravo, Brown and Levinson's concepts of positive and negative face cannot be applied in an intercultural way as every culture has a different conception of what face is and how it functions in society. Thus, Bravo proposed the concepts of *autonomy*, *affiliation and role*, which can better explain the idea of public image, as they can be built up according to every particular sociocultural context. The concept of autonomy refers to "aquellos comportamientos que están relacionados con cómo una persona desea verse y ser vista por los demás como un

individuo con contorno propio dentro del grupo.” (2002: 141-174) (behaviours related to how a person wishes to be seen by others, as an individual with his or her own boundary or identity in the group [my translation]). The concept of affiliation relates to “aquellos comportamientos en los cuales se refleja cómo una persona desea verse y ser vista por los demás en cuanto a aquellas características que la identifican con el grupo.” (2002: 141-174) (behaviours that reflect how a person wishes to be seen by others concerning those characteristics that identify him or her with the group [my translation]). As for the concept of role, it refers to the image that somebody may project, depending on the kind of activity, the context and the relationship among the participants. Thus, according to Bravo, the configuration of these three concepts will also vary depending on the cultural values of a group.

Spencer-Oatey (2000, 2003) is another author that inspired me for the construction of my model of social characteristics of individuals. This author makes a distinction between the concepts of face and sociality rights. The former is based on Goffman’s concept and it refers to the need of being appreciated by others. It is also related to Brown and Levinson’s concept of positive face. The latter is connected with these authors’ concept of negative face as it refers to the need of safeguarding one’s social and personal rights as well as one’s association and social justice rights. Spencer-Oatey’s concepts pretend to be a universal and non-ethnocentric framework for politeness in which the different characteristics of different cultures can be adjusted.

As we can see, both Spencer-Oatey and Bravo try to develop an etic/emic theory of politeness. In other words, anthropologists usually try to find the etic definition or explanation of a specific aspect in order to identify a sociocultural universal. In contrast, an emic definition will explain the distinct vision of an issue that a specific cultural group has. As Janney and Arndt (1993) point out, the problem is that linguistic theories usually focus on emic issues rather than considering politeness as an etic and universal matter. In fact, the aim of this paper is to offer an etic taxonomy of social characteristics that could be applied from an emic point of view to any particular cultural group.

### 3. Cultural differences and social characteristics of individuals

I would like now to present the model I propose which includes, on the one hand, a definition of the cultural dimensions of power and identity and, on the other, a taxonomy of social characteristics of individuals. As I mentioned before, the inspiration for the model came both from Hofstede and Leaptrott—regarding cultural dimensions—and from Bravo and Spencer-Oatey and their concepts of public image and social rights.

#### 3.1. Power and identity

Firstly, as regards the cultural dimension of power, I consider that this dimension is present in all societies and it is related to a hierarchy acceptance index, which explains how power is distributed in society, and to what extent people perceive and agree with that distribution of power. Therefore, there are cultural groups that have a high hierarchy acceptance index, which means that there is a significant stratification of power and that people accept that division, no matter how fair they think it is. Based on Hofstede’s postulates (Hofstede, 1980, 1991; Hofstede

et al, 2010), we could say that societies with a high hierarchy acceptance index will exhibit the following features:

- Inequality is something natural in society, it is basic to it and the only thing you can do is to dethrone the people on the top.
- There is an important centralisation of power and consequently a strong pyramidal organizational structure.
- Individuals who are in the levels of society with power make the crucial decisions for the rest of the group although in some cases they let people vote.
- Individuals who are in the levels with power consider the rest as if they belonged to an inferior category.
- Individuals who are in the levels of society without power are afraid of expressing their disagreement with the people with power.

Conversely, there are cultural groups that have a low hierarchy acceptance index, which means that there is a minimum level of hierarchy and that centralisation of power is not very emphasized. This paper claims that a society with a low hierarchy acceptance index will have the following characteristics (Hofstede, 1980, 1991; Hofstede et al, 2010):

- Inequality should be minimised and if it exists, it is the system's fault, so it should be substituted by another system.
- There is a minimum centralisation of power and a weak pyramidal organizational structure.
- Individuals who are in the levels of society that have power make the crucial decisions, but they usually consult the rest of the people.
- Individuals who are in the levels of society that have power consider the rest as belonging to the same category.
- Individuals who are in the levels of society without power are little afraid of expressing their disagreement with the people who have power.
- Independence is very much appreciated when performing a task, so supervision is considered something negative.

Having said that, we must consider that following Hofstede's calculations, both the United States and Spain would be cultural groups which are halfway the spectrum of the hierarchy acceptance index as the United States has an index of 40 points and Spain has 57 points in the continuum. However, as we can see, the United States would be more inclined to a low hierarchy acceptance index and Spain would be more prone to a high one.



Secondly, as for the cultural dimension of identity, this paper defines it as the dimension that accounts for the kind of relationship that an individual has with the rest of society, both from a personal point of view and from a social one. It is measured with the so-called individualism index, related to a continuum known as collectivism-individualism. Thus, at one end of the spectrum, we can find individualist societies with a high individualism index, whereas at the other end, we can find collectivist societies with a low individualism index. Halfway between these two extremes we would find tribal societies (Leaptrott, 1996), which may be inclined towards either individualism or collectivism.

This paper suggests that the features present in an individualist society—as for example the United States with 91 points on Hofstede's scale—can be summarised in the following ones (Hofstede, 1980, 1991; Hofstede et al, 2010):

- Freedom and independence in one's personal and nuclear family life are highly valued.
- Being able to take independent decisions is highly appreciated.
- Independence, honesty and clarity when expressing one's opinion are highly esteemed.
- Norms and rights must be equal for everybody.
- One must be accountable for their acts and their consequences.

Regarding tribal societies such as Spain—which is at the intersection of individualism and collectivism—this paper claims that we would probably find these features (Hofstede, 1980, 1991; Hofstede et al, 2010):

- Freedom and independence in one's personal and family life are highly valued.
- Friendship relationships, a sense of belonging to a small group and the extended family are all valued and appreciated.
- Loyalty, support and a sense of duty inside and towards the group are highly esteemed.
- Group decision-making is highly valued.
- Honesty and clarity when expressing one's opinion inside the group are highly appreciated.
- Norms and rights are applied depending on individual relationships.

### 3.2. Social characteristics and impoliteness

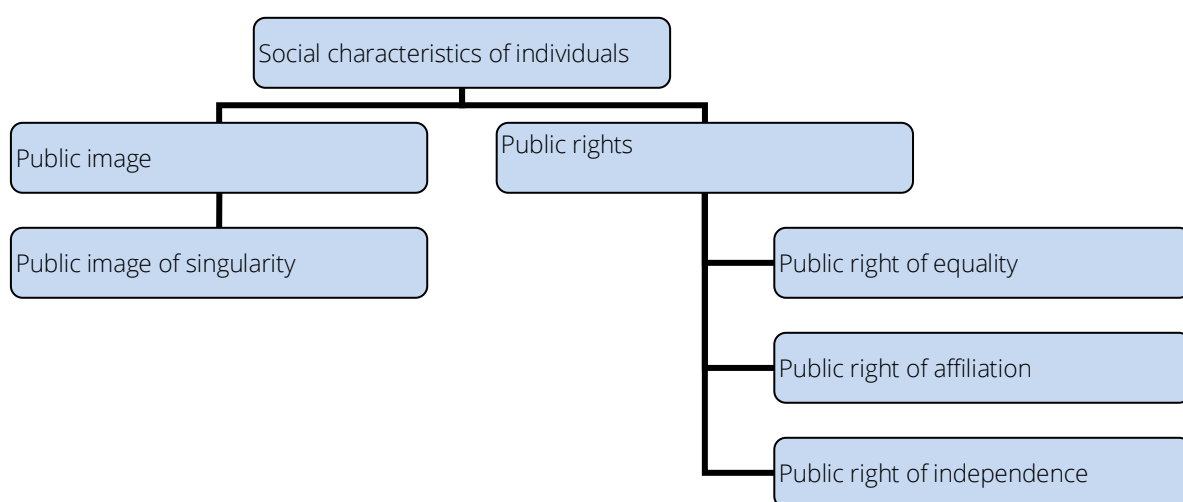
In this paper, I would like to introduce a new taxonomy which reorganises the traditional concepts of face and social rights. As I see it, every individual is part of a bigger social group. If a person is not brought up and does not grow up surrounded by other people, he or she will not develop the typical features and characteristics of a human being. The reason for this is that, from the very first moment of our lives, we have to be in contact with other people and feel their

care and attention so that our brain can develop properly. In my opinion, two types of characteristics that every individual displays when interacting with other individuals are their public image and their public rights. These characteristics will be inherent to every individual embedded in society, although they will be understood and oriented depending on the cultural values that each society emphasises.

To start with, I maintain that the concept of public image refers to the image that an individual exhibits and displays in front of the rest of people. In other words, it refers to the way somebody would like to be considered by the rest of the group. However, I argue that the term *of singularity* should be added to public image. Thus, when we talk about the public image of singularity we refer to someone's desire to be valued for their personal virtues, for their positive aptitudes and skills and for being able to do things properly. In other words, it refers to the desire to be recognized as a valid and competent individual and the desire to be positively acknowledged by society.

Besides the public image of singularity, we can talk about the public rights that all individuals can promote, impose or claim to the rest of the group, depending on the cultural values of the group. Spencer-Oatey (2000, 2003) and Bravo's works (1999, 2002) inspired me when developing the taxonomy of public social rights that follows: The public right of equality relates to an individual's desire to be treated fairly in relation to the rest of the group, that is to say, the desire to be considered a peer by the rest of the group, taking into account one's personal singularities but with the same rights as other people. We talk about the public right of affiliation, to refer to an individual's need to feel part of society and a member of a group. In other words, it is the desire not to be a social outcast, but a recognized and valued member in society. Finally, we can find the public right of independence, which relates to one's need to preserve his or her physical and emotional territory free from attacks or threats. It is also the desire to be respected, have the freedom to act and not to be invaded by anybody in the group or by the group itself.

The following graph summarises the social characteristics of individuals described above.



Graph 1. Social characteristics of individuals presented in this paper



We must consider that every culture will emphasise the public image of singularity and the public rights differently, and will also do so by using different linguistic tools, social norms or cultural values. Thus, for instance, an individualist society will tend to give greater importance to the public image of singularity, the public right of equality and the public right of independence, owing to the importance that individual actions and independence of opinions have, and also to the relevance of freedom to act independently from the group. On the contrary, in a collectivist society, the public image of singularity will be valued, but most of all, the emphasis will be placed on the public right of affiliation, as the individual's actions can be framed and controlled by the group which he or she belongs to. Finally, a tribal cultural group will tend to give greater prominence to the public image of singularity, the public right of equality and the public right of affiliation. This is because individuals in a tribal society like to feel they are part of a group, but at the same time, they tend to claim their singularity inside the group.

As for the cultural dimension of power, we can assume that in a society with a low hierarchy acceptance index, the public right of equality will play a major role as this right highlights the individual's desire to be valued and treated as the rest of society. In other words, the weaker the hierarchy in a society is, the more equal the individuals belonging to it want to feel. On the contrary, in a high hierarchy acceptance index society, the public right of equality will not be taken very much into account as individuals know that there are people who have more power because they are in a different layer of the hierarchical pyramid. Individuals feel that people in the highest levels of the pyramid will have more rights than the rest, as they do not share the same status in society.

An example of these statements can be found in (Pacheco, 2011b) previous work. The research showed that in an individualist society such as the American one, strategies which try to attack the individualist values of independence, autonomy of actions, freedom, etc., are mostly used. However, in a tribal society like the Spanish one, we can find attacks which target the tribal values of sense of belonging to a group, and at the same time, the need of feeling independent to a certain extent.

The same conclusions were found in another previous work (Pacheco, 2011a), but with the case of the use of politeness strategies. On this occasion, the cultural groups under study were a group of British citizens and a Spanish group. The different politeness strategies used by each different group were related to the diverse cultural values that these two cultures have, being the British group another example of individualist society.

#### 4. Corpus and methodology

There was a total of sixty-four respondents in this study. They came from two different groups; one was formed by thirty-four students from the Degree in Business Studies at the University of Alicante. The other group consisted of thirty American students doing a Spanish course also at this University. This sample should only be taken as a representative sample, i.e., just one example that prompts usage preferences of individuals and that could be extrapolated to the cultural group to which these respondents belong to, taking into account, as we mentioned

before, that personality traits of each individual and the context they are in should always be considered.

The aim was to find out which actions or strategies each of the cultural groups would use more frequently in a working environment. A questionnaire was designed with actions that allegedly attacked the public image and the public rights of individuals—or the four social characteristics of individuals as presented in this paper. The two versions of the questionnaire can be found at the end of this paper in appendix 1. The actions that appear in the questionnaire are related to a series of impoliteness strategies which form part of my doctoral dissertation and that due to length limitations I cannot display in this paper.

In general terms, as I see it, impoliteness could be defined as actions or phrases which attack or go against an individual's public image or their public rights. The receiver will consider an expression polite or impolite depending on the context in which the communicative act happens. The context can include various factors among which we must consider cultural and social values and norms.

Thus, for instance, some of the respondents chose actions that were meant to attack the public image of singularity. These attacks implied that the sender did not consider the receiver as someone competent and valued for his or her positive skills and aptitudes. By using these actions, the speaker attacks the hearer's public image of singularity because he or she undermines someone's desire to be taken into consideration and to be considered a competent individual capable of doing things right. Some answers that portrayed these ideas were the following ones:

- (1) Not take into account somebody's opinion
- (2) Insult somebody
- (3) Insinuate somebody else's negative aspects
- (4) Insinuate someone that they made a mistake
- (5) Question somebody's ability to perform the task
- (6) Blame somebody
- (7) Ignore somebody

Other respondents chose actions which attack the public right of equality or one's desire of being considered as a peer by the rest of individuals, that is to say, with the same rights and obligations as the group. For instance, if the speaker breaks the rules and does not treat the receiver as an equal, he or she is attacking the receiver's public right of equality. Some of the items representing this idea were the following ones:

- (1) Despise somebody
- (2) Bully someone (because of differences in status, position, etc.)
- (3) Tell somebody that they are indebted to someone else
- (4) Use an improper or obscene language
- (5) Undervalue somebody
- (6) Not meet general rules and obligations

The following group of strategies was related to the public right of affiliation, and they were aimed to make the hearer think that they are not part of a group and that they could not be accepted by the rest:

- (1) Scorn somebody in front of other people
- (2) Exclude somebody from the conversation
- (3) Seek conflict talking about difficult topics
- (4) Break the personal or labour relationship with someone

Finally, concerning actions that threaten the public right of independence or someone's desire to keep one's territory safe from attacks, to have the freedom of action and not to be invaded by the group, respondents chose actions such as:

- (1) Interrupt someone's speech
- (2) Threaten someone
- (3) Invade somebody else's physical or emotional territory
- (4) Boast about something that damages or harms somebody

Once the questionnaires were collected, I counted the times each answer, that is to say, each strategy, had been used in each group. Then, I added all the answers obtained in each group, in order to determine the percentages that corresponded to each strategy. These percentages are shown in Table 2.

## 5. Analysis and conclusion

As Table 2 below clearly shows, there are some differences worth commenting briefly.

	Public Image of Singularity	Public Right of Equality	Public Right of Affiliation	Public Right of Independence
Spanish group	29.17%	35.29%	18.38%	17.15%
American group	39.88%	31.55%	11.60%	16.97%

Table 2. Differences found in the two cultural groups' responses to the questionnaire

As the results show, we find that strategies that attack the public right of equality—35.29% of the total—were mostly used in the Spanish group. Besides, 29.17% of the strategies were aimed at undermining the public image of singularity. As I mentioned above, the public image of singularity and the public right of equality, together with the public right of affiliation are three social characteristics that receive greater attention in a tribal cultural group such as the Spanish one. That is the reason why, in third place, we find that 18.38% of the strategies were targeted towards harming the public right of affiliation. This could be due to the fact that the relationships that individuals establish within small groups such as the family, groups at work or with friends are of great importance in a tribal cultural group (Goodwin and Plaza, 2000; Leaptrott, 1996). In the last place, we find strategies that attack the public right of independence —17.15% of the total.

Regarding the group of American respondents, we can see that the strategies that students chose the most were those that attack the public image of singularity, with 39.88% of the total, followed by strategies which harm the public right of equality, with 31.55% of total responses. This result shows that like in the Spanish group, these two social characteristics are crucial for an individualist cultural group. Nevertheless, unlike the Spanish respondents, the American ones chose strategies that attack the public right of independence in third place, with 16.97% of the total, because feeling the need of keeping one's territory apart from others is of great importance for people in individualist cultural groups (Hofstede, 1991; Kooyers, 2015).

As I see it, we can relate these differences to the different cultural values that these two cultures have. Thus, for instance, due to the fact that Spain is a tribal culture (Leaptrott, 1996), the public right of affiliation receives more relevance than in the individualist American group. The reason for this is that in a tribal culture, people need to feel that they are accepted by the group to a certain extent. Conversely, for an individualist culture like the American one, not being patronised or strictly supervised is a very important value, as everyone must account for his or her actions (Hofstede, 1991). That is why impoliteness strategies that attack the public image of singularity will be used with a higher frequency than in the Spanish group. For instance, by questioning the addressee's capability of doing their work properly the sender is attacking the receiver's public image of singularity. In addition, the protection of territory and freedom of action are very relevant individualist values. So, if a colleague tries to supervise or criticise somebody else's work, that will also be considered impolite. In this case, we refer to attacks to the public right of independence.

Finally, Pearson's chi-square test was applied. On the one hand, the null hypothesis would suggest that there are no significant differences in the frequencies shown by the group of American students and the Spanish group, with regard to the use of actions that attack the four social characteristics. On the other hand, the alternative hypothesis would be that there are significant differences in the frequencies shown by the group of American students and the Spanish one, regarding the use of actions that attack the four social characteristics. Table 3 shows the total data obtained from the questionnaires, to which the chi-square formula was applied later. The figures indicate the actions that were repeatedly chosen by each group. Thus, for instance, the Spanish respondents chose 119 times actions meant to attack the public image of singularity, from a total of 408 answers.

	Spain	United States	Total
P.I Singularity	119	134	253
P.R. Equality	144	106	250
P.R. Affiliation	75	39	114
P.R. Independence	70	57	127
Total	408	336	744

Table 3. Contingency table with the data obtained from the questionnaires

When applying the formula with a 0.05 degree of statistical significance, that corresponds to 7.81 following Pearson's table (Velez et al., 2004), the result was 12.51, which means that we must accept the alternative hypothesis, as the result is higher than the figure given in Pearson's table. In other words, the findings from the analysis show that, from a statistical point of view, there are differences in the actions or strategies that the respondents in the two cultural groups chose.

To conclude, we could say that the findings in this paper lead us to maintain that the influence of our cultural values will reflect upon the use of the language, especially during the use of impoliteness strategies. The reason for this is that these strategies try to undermine our public image and rights or as I have put it here, our social characteristics. Thus, as it has been observed, for an individualist cultural group such as the American culture, the public image of singularity and the public right of independence will receive greater importance than in the Spanish culture, which is considered to be a tribal cultural group. For this latter group, the public right of affiliation, together with the public image of singularity will be taken as crucial features to protect. In each of the groups, these preferences are mostly targeted and attacked by using impoliteness strategies that threaten these characteristics.

A further research following this paper could include a deeper classification and enumeration of impoliteness strategies that speakers can make use of and that, as I said, owing to space reasons it has been impossible to display in this paper. These strategies would also be related to the social characteristics—the public image of singularity and the public rights of equality, affiliation and independence. The aim would be to further illustrate that speakers from different cultural groups will use different strategies depending on the social characteristic that they mean to discredit.

## About the author

Dr Rosa M. Pacheco Baldó is a part-time lecturer in the Department of English Studies at the University of Alicante. She's a Doctor in English Studies and she has an additional degree in Social and Cultural Anthropology. Thus, her preferred field of study is intercultural pragmatics, with a special interest in comparative linguistics and cultural issues. Her line of research is focused on how cultural differences reflect upon speakers' discourse, particularly in the field of social sciences.

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## APPENDIX 1

### CUESTIONARIO SOBRE ESTRATEGIAS DE DESCORTESÍA

Señale las TRES ACCIONES que le parezcan las más descorteses de cada grupo

#### **CASO A**

En una reunión en su lugar de trabajo, ¿qué le sentaría peor?

	Que no tomasen en cuenta su opinión
	Que alguien exagerase sobre sus capacidades
	Que abusasen de las diferencias de status, condición, situación, etc.
	Que le dijeran que está en deuda
	Que interrumpiesen bruscamente mientras usted está hablando
	Que lo ridiculizasen frente a otros
	Que no mostrasen empatía ni comprensión con usted
	Que alguien le insinuara que está en deuda
	Que le excluyesen de la conversación
	Que le despreciasen

#### **CASO B**

Acaba de conocer a una persona nueva en su lugar de trabajo. ¿Qué le parecería de peor educación?

	Que pusiera de manifiesto las diferencias de status, posición, condición, etc.
	Que fingiese cortesía con usted
	Que no fuera cortés con usted cuando debería serlo
	Que no cumpliera las reglas y obligaciones generales
	Que se jactara de algo negativo que le perjudica a usted
	Que buscase el conflicto con temas difíciles
	Que usase un lenguaje que usted no entendiera
	Que no utilizase un lenguaje de respeto cuando fuese necesario (ej. usar tú/usted, etc.)
	Que negase la posibilidad de relación futura
	Que insinuase algún aspecto negativo de usted

**CASO C**

En su lugar de trabajo, está usted manteniendo una conversación agitada con otra persona. ¿Qué le sentaría peor que hiciese?

	Que le ignorase
	Que le amenazase
	Que le insultara
	Que se burlase de usted
	Que usase un lenguaje obsceno e inapropiado
	Que insistiera en algún aspecto negativo
	Que le culpara directamente de un acto
	Que le diese órdenes
	Que rompiesen la relación (personal, de amistad, de compañerismo) con usted

**CASO D**

Estando usted realizando una tarea en su puesto de trabajo, ¿qué es lo que más le molestaría que hiciese un/a compañero/a o su jefe/a?

	Que pusiesen en duda sus capacidades
	Que pusieran de manifiesto algún aspecto negativo de usted
	Que pusiesen de manifiesto que se ha equivocado
	Que buscasen el desacuerdo
	Que invadiesen su espacio físico o emocional
	Que le menospreciaran
	Que insinuase que se ha equivocado

**IMPOLITENESS STRATEGIES QUESTIONNAIRE**

In the following cases please indicate which THREE ACTIONS are the most impolite of each group.

**CASE A**

In a meeting at work, which of the following actions would annoy you the most?

	Your opinion not being taken into account
	Someone overstating their own abilities
	Being bullied by someone (because of differences in status, position, etc.)
	Being told that you are indebted to someone
	Being interrupted
	Being scorned in front of other people
	Being excluded from the conversation
	Being despised

**CASE B**

If you had just met a new colleague at work, which of the following do you think would be the most impolite?

	Your colleague stating the differences in status, condition, position, etc.
	His/her using mock politeness
	His/her lack of politeness
	His/her not meeting general rules and obligations
	His/her boasting about something that damages or harms you
	His/her seeking conflict talking about difficult topics
	His/her insinuating your negative aspects

**CASE C**

If you were arguing with somebody at work, which of the following actions would annoy you the most?

	Being ignored
	Being threatened
	Being insulted
	Being scorned
	Someone using an improper or obscene language
	Someone putting the blame on you
	Someone breaking the personal or labour relationship with you

**CASE D**

If you were carrying a task at your workplace, which of the following situations would annoy you the most?

	Somebody questioning your ability to perform the task
	Somebody stating any of your negative aspects
	Somebody stating your mistakes
	Somebody seeking disagreement
	Somebody invading your physical or emotional territory
	Somebody undervaluing you
	Someone insinuating you made a mistake